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Report of the Friends of the Chair group on Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and on open data

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2018/227 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Friends of the Chair group on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and on open data. The group describes its work on the global survey on self-assessment by countries on the implementation of the Principles, a background document supplementing the guidelines for the implementation of the Principles and a background document on work in relation to open data.

* E/CN.3/2019/1.

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Report of the Friends of the Chair group on Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and on open data

I. Introduction and background

1. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics[1] were endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/261 on 29 January 2014. The Assembly endorsed the Principles on the twentieth anniversary of their adoption by the Statistical Commission. From 2011 to 2015, a Friends of the Chair group worked on selected dimensions of the implementation of the Principles in the context of the twentieth anniversary of their adoption.

2. In 2017, the Commission, in its decision 48/107, re-established the Friends of the Chair group to work on selected dimensions of the implementation of the Fundamental Principles in the context of the preparation for the twenty-fifth anniversary of their adoption, to be celebrated in 2019.

3. In addition, in 2018, the Commission, in its decision 49/105, created a subgroup on open data under the Friends of the Chair group to work on principles, guidance and support for the implementation of open data in countries.

4. By integrating open data into its current work on the Fundamental Principles, the global statistical community very purposefully allowed for the opportunity to broadly rethink how to implement the Principles in the light of new data needs, including for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. Work programme

5. The Friends of the Chair group, constituted in February 2018, consists of 11 country representatives and eight international agencies and international organizations as observers (see annex I to the present report). New Zealand is the Chair of the group, with assistance from Australia.

6. The terms of reference of the group were developed in April 2018 and approved by the Bureau of the Commission (see annex II to the present report). Concerning the organization of its work, the group held a physical meeting on the sidelines of the forty-ninth session of the Commission, in March 2018, and then held regular teleconferences every six weeks (on 16 May, 27 June, 8 August, 19 September, 31 October and 12 December 2018; an upcoming meeting is scheduled for 23 January 2019) to review progress.

7. The primary objectives of the group include work on both the Fundamental Principles and on open data, carrying out activities using the Principles as the overarching context for both.

8. To facilitate the organization of activities, two work streams were developed. The first was focused solely on the Fundamental Principles and comprised the following activities:

(a) A global survey based on a self-assessment of the implementation of the Principles, which also includes specific topics relating to open data practices;

(b) The development of a background document to supplement the existing implementation guidelines for the Principles to support their use, including case

[1] See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/FP-New-E.pdf.

studies, and which is also aimed at providing criteria to evaluate perceived non-compliance with the Principles;

(c) The analysis of other matters relating to the Principles as they arise in other contexts, including their application in the use of non-official and non-traditional data.

9. The second work stream was focused on open data in the context of the Fundamental Principles and comprised the following activities:

(a) Mapping open data principles to the Fundamental Principles;

(b) The development of a background document to synthesize existing open data work covering data interoperability, the implementation of open data practices and the anonymization of data for official statistics;

(c) The analysis of other matters relating to the implementation of open data in official statistics, including legal frameworks, technical aspects and the capacities needed, also included in the background document.

III. Summary of work stream outputs

A. Work stream on the Fundamental Principles

Global survey on self-assessment by countries on the implementation of the Fundamental Principles

10. The questionnaire was based on earlier versions sent to countries by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in 2003 and 2012, respectively,[2] to assess the implementation of the Fundamental Principles. The new, updated version was prepared with the contribution of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), and with the aim of modernizing and improving previous versions, while still maintaining the core questions similar to those in the 2012 edition of the questionnaire to allow for a review of progress.

11. Notable differences include revised and expanded options for each answer based on the implementation guide for the Principles and the results of previous questionnaires, as well as the revision of the wording of questions to improve the consistency of answers, since in 2012 some contradictions between questions were highlighted. The questionnaire also includes new questions relating to open data and non-official and non-traditional data to better appreciate the current situation of national statistical offices and their use of information from an expanded data ecosystem.

12. Over 80 countries had completed the questionnaire at the time of writing, with more expected to do so in the coming weeks. A full analysis of the results is provided in a background document for review by the Commission.

13. It is anticipated that the global survey will be launched for every five-year anniversary of the Fundamental Principles. Therefore, the next survey will be conducted in advance of the thirtieth anniversary of the Principles, to be celebrated in 2024.

[2] See E/CN.3/2004/21 and E/CN.3/2013/3. See also the background document with further information on the 2012 questionnaire results that accompanies document E/CN.3/2013/3, available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/BG-FP.pdf.

Background document supplementing existing implementation guidelines, including the application of the Fundamental Principles for non-official and non-traditional data

14. The first section of the background document will supplement the *United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: Implementation Guidelines*[3] to support the guidelines' use and additionally provides criteria to evaluate perceived non-compliance. The first section will also utilize information from the global survey on self-assessment by countries on the implementation of the Fundamental Principles and country experiences of implementation challenges, successes and best practices of the Principles. In the second section, the Principles will be mapped against non-official and non-traditional data sources, aiming to highlight their applicability to new data sources, which are becoming more widely used in countries and are beginning to be integrated into official statistical systems.

B. Work stream on open data: background document on the implementation of open data

15. The background document on the implementation of open data provides a synthesis of existing open data work covering data interoperability, the implementation of open data practices and the anonymization of data for official statistics. It also includes an analysis of other matters relating to the implementation of open data in official statistics, including legal frameworks, technical aspects and required capabilities. In an annex to the background document, the Fundamental Principles will be mapped to the Open Data Charter[4] to show interrelationships and where the Principles may be integrated. The Charter is currently undergoing a global review to assess whether its principles need updating to include further advances in processes and principles relating to open data. The Friends of the Chair group will adjust the mapping if there are significant changes.

IV. Recent global activities highlighting the Fundamental Principles and open data

16. The International Open Data Conference 2018,[5] held in Buenos Aires on 27 and 28 September 2018, brought together the global open data community to define strategies to advance open data both locally and globally. A one-day pre-event was organized by Open Data Watch in collaboration with the Division on the theme "National reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals: addressing interoperability and open data", which brought together national statistical offices and relevant stakeholders to discuss how to ensure that national reporting platforms for the Goals integrated the principles of open data and interoperability. The pre-event also provided a dedicated space for representatives of national statistical offices to share their experiences, including the challenges that they were facing, and to get to know the relevant stakeholder groups that are positioned to support them.[6] The event was a unique opportunity for statisticians to engage with open data practitioners from other data communities.

[3] See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/Implementation_Guidelines_FINAL_without_edit.pdf.

[4] See https://opendatacharter.net/principles/.

[5] See www.opendatacon.org/.

[6] A document highlighting outcomes of the pre-event is available at https://opendatawatch.com/publications/iodc18-pre-event-outcome-report/.

17. During the second United Nations World Data Forum,[7] held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 22 to 24 October 2018, the first version of a guide entitled "Data interoperability: a practitioner's guide to joining up data in the development sector"[8] was launched by the collaborative on Sustainable Development Goal data interoperability.[9] The guide was developed as a practical tool to help to improve the integration and reusability of data and data systems. New sections, examples and guidance will be added over time to ensure its continued relevance and usefulness in this fast-evolving area. The guide is considered a living document and was welcomed by the Friends of the Chair group as a resource for countries and included as a background document to the present report as input for the Commission's discussions.

V. Way forward

18. At its first meeting, the group discussed its mandate and the timeline for the activities outlined by the Commission in its decisions, noting that the work on the Fundamental Principles had a well-established line of work throughout the years, while open data were a new area possibly requiring further work moving forward. Therefore, when reviewing the work that it was mandated to undertake, the group decided that the work on the Principles had concluded for that round of review, but that periodic five-year reviews of the global implementation of the Principles, aligned with the five-year anniversaries of their adoption, should continue in order to chart progress and allow focus on aspects of implementation where needed, as well as to share best practices. Therefore, it is recommended that the Friends of the Chair group be resumed in time for the next review, in advance of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Principles, to be celebrated in 2024. In the meantime, any pressing issues, such as perceived non-compliance, should be considered by the Commission as necessary. In order for the open data work to continue, it is recommended that a working group on open data be created, which would allow for the collaboration between the international open data and statistical communities to be continued and also support efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. If established, the group would develop terms of reference for the work going forward, based on the decisions of the Commission.

19. Some members of the Friends of the Chair group have expressed interest in participating in the proposed working group on open data; New Zealand has offered to continue as Chair. Additional members are invited to express interest in joining.

VI. Points for discussion

20. **The Statistical Commission is invited:**

(a) **To express its views on the document containing the results of the global survey on self-assessment by countries on the implementation of the Fundamental Principles and on open data;**

(b) **To express its views on the document on data interoperability and open data entitled "Data interoperability: a practitioner's guide to joining up data in the development sector";**

[7] See https://undataforum.org/.

[8] See https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/InteropGuide/Home.

[9] The collaborative was established in March 2017 at a side event of the forty-eighth session of the Commission and convened by the Division and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.

(c) To review and approve the document supplementing the guidelines for the implementation of the Fundamental Principles;

(d) To review and approve the document on the implementation of open data;

(e) To review and approve the proposal to consider the work of the Friends of the Chair group concluded for the present round, but to be resumed in time for the next appraisal, in 2024, and for a working group to be established in order to continue the work on open data, which would present its work at the fifty-first session of the Commission and every two years thereafter.

Annex I

Membership of the Friends of the Chair group

Chair

New Zealand

Members

Argentina
Australia
Egypt
Italy
Jordan
Malaysia
Mauritius
Poland
Suriname
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Observers

Collaborative on Sustainable Development Goal data interoperability
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
International Statistical Institute
Open Data Watch
Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21)
United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management secretariat
World Bank

Annex II

Terms of reference of the Friends of the Chair group on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

I. Background

1. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/261 on 29 January 2014, on the twentieth anniversary of their adoption by the Statistical Commission.

2. From 2011 to 2015, a Friends of the Chair group worked on selected dimensions of the implementation of the Fundamental Principles in connection with the twentieth anniversary of their adoption. At the forty-eighth session of the Commission, a Friends of the Chair group was created by the Commission in its decision 48/107 to work on selected dimensions of the implementation of the Principles in the context of the preparations for the twenty-fifth anniversary of their adoption, to be celebrated in 2019.

3. In addition, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission, a subgroup under the Friends of the Chair group was created by the Commission in its decision 49/105 to work on principles, guidance and support for the implementation of open data in countries.

II. Objectives and tasks

4. The primary objectives of the Friends of the Chair group include work on both the Fundamental Principles and on open data.

5. In decision 48/107, the following work programme was agreed to, contained in paragraph 4 of E/CN.3/2017/9:

(a) To develop and agree on suitable tools and methods for assessing the implementation of the Fundamental Principles;

(b) To conduct a global assessment before the fiftieth session of the Statistical Commission, in 2019, which will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Fundamental Principles by the Commission;

(c) To review and, if necessary, update the current implementation guidelines;

(d) To re-evaluate the mechanisms focused on how to best address perceived non-compliance with the Fundamental Principles;

(e) To examine any matters relating to the Fundamental Principles as they may arise in other contexts, such as quality assurance or in the use of non-official and non-traditional data.

6. In addition, in its decision 48/107 the Commission:

(a) Cautioned against changing the Fundamental Principles at that point and encouraged the group to focus its reflection on their implementation and to examine a potentially widened scope of the Principles with respect to non-official and non-traditional data;

(b) Requested the group to take into account current discussions on open data, big data and quality assurance;

(c) Requested the group to propose ways to give the Fundamental Principles higher visibility, in particular beyond the community of official statistics.

7. In its decision 49/105, the Commission requested the subgroup on open data to deliver on the proposed tasks of reviewing principles and legal frameworks for open data, clarifying technical aspects and skills needed and providing guidance on implementation, including anonymization of data, as detailed in paragraph 21 of document E/CN.3/2018/6. The Commission also requested the subgroup to map open data principles to the Fundamental Principles and address the need for data interoperability principles and tools.

III. Membership

8. The Friends of the Chair group will consist of country representatives and international agencies and international organizations as observers. The Chair will be assumed by New Zealand, with assistance from Australia. The Group will comprise country representatives from Argentina, Egypt, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Poland, Suriname and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The International Statistical Institute is an observer. Additional country representatives may join the group, as may international organizations as observers, in particular those that expressed interest in doing so during the forty-eighth and forty-ninth sessions of the Commission or that have expressed interest to the Chair.

9. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat will serve as the secretariat of the group.

IV. Organization of work

10. The group will work through electronic exchanges and periodic meetings whenever possible. Where feasible, the meetings will be conducted in conjunction with other meetings being held throughout the year.

V. Expected duration

11. The group will report to the Commission at its fiftieth session on the work of the group regarding the Fundamental Principles and the work on open data with a set of recommendations on whether its work is complete or needs to continue, especially given that the open data mandate is new.

VI. Proposed activities

12. In line with the mandate and further guidance given by the Commission, the group will carry out its activities using the Fundamental Principles as the overarching context for both work streams. To facilitate the organization of the activities, two work streams are proposed, with the first focused solely on the Principles, namely:

(a) A global survey based on a self-assessment of the implementation of the Fundamental Principles questionnaire, followed by peer-review case studies on their implementation;

(b) The development of a background document that supplements the existing implementation guidelines of the Fundamental Principles to support their use, including case studies, which would also aim to provide criteria to evaluate perceived non-compliance with the Principles;

(c) Analysis of other matters relating to the Fundamental Principles as they arise in other contexts, including their application in the use of non-official and non-traditional data.

13. The second work stream will focus on open data in the context of the Fundamental Principles, namely:

(a) Mapping open data principles to the Fundamental Principles and other relevant principles used in other groups such as the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics;

(b) The development of a background document that synthesizes existing open data work covering data interoperability, the implementation of open data practices and the anonymization of data for official statistics;

(c) Analysis of other matters relating to the implementation of open data in official statistics, including legal frameworks, technical aspects and the capabilities needed.